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ABSTRACT

This report discusses what makes news, what people want to read, and how to write news releases or other informative bulletins and brochures. Also included are a description of principal-reporter-editor relations, some layout and typography data, and photography instructions. (JF)

ED 060538

PR FOR PRINCIPALS

HOW TO TELL THE STORY

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GUIDELINES FOR
WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS

Published by the PENNSYLVANIA
SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION, INC.

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EA 004 008

PUBLIC RELATIONS

FOR

PRINCIPALS

"A Guidebook for the
Pennsylvania Administrator"

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FOREWORD

The Pennsylvania School Boards Association is pleased to reprint this guidebook "Public Relations for Principals," developed by the Gloucester (N. J.) County Elementary Principals' and Supervisors' Professional Improvement Project.

The project, directed by County Superintendent J. Harvey Shue, evolved from the realization that school administrators need to be more aware of the importance of effectively "telling the story" of their school to the community and the public. In a series of meetings, the participants met with consultants trained in the field of public relations to consider what makes news, what do people want to read, and how to write news releases and other informative-type bulletins and brochures.

Consultants for the publication were Dr. Donald Bagin and Frank Grazian of the Communications Division, Glassboro State College. Both gentlemen have participated in PSBA sponsored School-Community Relations Seminars in Pennsylvania. Also contributing to the booklet was Miss Wendy Warner, Glassboro State College graduate student, who used the proceedings as a basis for her Master's thesis.

Every administrator will find the booklet informative and a handy reference in carrying out a portion of his daily communications duties.

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WHAT IS SCHOOL NEWS?

People want to read news about pupil progress, methods of teaching, what pupils study, special services, discipline, sports and student activities. Are they getting what they want in your school district? How often have you contacted the newspaper in your area about a news or feature story about new techniques or unusual classroom events? If you don't go into the classroom where "it's happening" and tell the story to the press, it's probably not going to get there.

Nothing to tell? Don't believe it. Perhaps your school isn't using programmed learning or modular scheduling, but there is always news in student planning of exhibits, field-trips and unusual parent involvement in school activities. Play up the student involvement. Commonplace activities such as plays don't stand a chance of getting printed except in a local weekly unless the unusual is stressed. Find a new peg for the common story. Relate new programs to national trends. Update the story using a different slant.

News the papers really want is often overlooked because people have a stereotyped idea of what school newspapers want. Check your story for news value. Papers receive releases from all the schools in their area. Would the average reader read your story and say "so what?" To be of news value, your story should be:

- **Timely**
- **Local in nature**
- **Of consequence to the average reader**
- **From an important source**
- **Suspenseful**
- **Unusual**
- **A conflict such as in sports**
- **Of human interest**
- **An explanation of progress**

Does your story meet the first three criteria and one other? If so, send it to the papers.

PRINCIPAL – REPORTER – EDITOR RELATIONS

People want to learn more about their schools. They want to know how and what the local schools are doing to educate their children. As the public watchdog, the press feels responsible for telling the community how the schools are spending public funds.

Newspapers are placing more emphasis on education news. They want in-depth coverage of interesting, informative and entertaining school news. As principal, you are a key person in the school-press communication. Establish strong channels of communication. Press relations exist whether or not you like it. Your problem is to develop good press relations. When dealing with the press, remember:

- **Establish a policy so that everyone in the school knows who speaks to the press for the school.**
- **The press is interested in school news that has news value.**
- **The press is entitled to its own ideas based on accurate information.**

Like you, the newspaper editor is very busy. On a large paper, he is mainly concerned with policy making. If he works on a small paper, he may also write editorials and stories, sell advertising and set copy. The editor works on a tight schedule determined by newspaper deadlines. Get to know the editor on an informal basis. Establish rapport. Meet with him at his convenience to discuss school problems. Friday is usually the best time for the editor of a weekly paper to get free.

Many newspapers are under-staffed. Only the larger ones have a person in charge of only education. Help. Jot down ideas for stories as you think of them. Get the news from the classroom out to the press. Give newspapers leads on features and in-depth reports. When a reporter is assigned to cover a story at your school, help him by:

- **Being available to give information at any time.**
- **Giving him enough notice of the activity to obtain background information.**
- **Providing written background for stories to save him time.**
- **Being truthful and giving accurate facts.**
- **Leveling and putting facts into perspective.**
- **Spelling names and giving titles of people in a story.**
- **Having people ready for him when he arrives.**

Do not blame reporters for misleading headlines. They do not write them. Should inaccuracies occur in a story, invite the reporter in to discuss the error. He may have misunderstood a point or sections may have been changed after he submitted the story. If errors occur often and talking to the reporter fails to produce change, discuss the problem with the editor.

Invite reporters to background sessions. Ask the reporter if he wants "off the record" information as background. Some reporters

would rather search things out themselves. If the reporter requests information "off the record" be sure that he knows when you are talking "on the record" and when off. You are on the record any time you talk to a reporter unless you specify beforehand that you are talking "off the record."

Be sure the reporter will honor the confidence. If one breaks a story that was given "off the record" in a conference, others will follow. If a reporter uncovers a story before you tell him about it "off the record" he needs not hold the story.

In Pennsylvania, your school board meetings are open to the public. Remind board members that anything they say at an open meeting can be printed in the paper. Determine who will be spokesman for the board. Warn members to avoid making rash statements. All actions by the board are public record.

Board meetings are good times to have teachers present reports on curriculum areas to the board and the press. Reporters may decide to do an indepth study later. A mimeographed agenda, routine reports and lists of names that will be brought up at the meeting should be sent to reporters before a board meeting so that they can write these stories in advance. After the meeting, they can revise the stories if needed.

Newspaper people are human. Sometimes their prejudices bias their reporting of school news. An informal talk with them about school activities may help opinions on school matters. Have them meet the staff and speak about school news at staff meetings.

Have parents and friends write letters to the editor presenting the facts. If all else fails, approach the editor through the publisher or mutual friends. Whatever you do, remember that you must work with the paper later. They can make life rough for you.

> *When there isn't a reporter available, be one. Write releases and feature stories, call in last minute stories, take photographs. Find out the papers' policies about news releases. Many papers request the procedure described on pages 9 and 10.*

Papers function on a tight schedule. Try to time your releases to meet newspaper deadlines. Split your releases equally between the morning and evening papers. Release some stories in the morning; some in the afternoon. Break some in the beginning of the week to meet weeklies' deadlines. Update other releases for local weeklies.

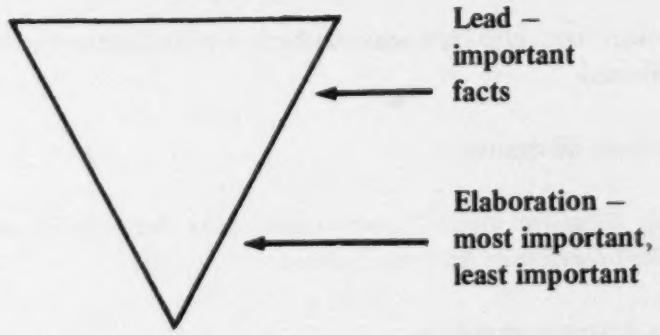
Don't play favorites. If you give a story to one paper, give it to all. Should a reporter uncover a story, don't notify the other papers about it. Do not ask that a story be used as written. Allow for rewriting and shortening to fit limited space. Do not complain unless the meaning is changed.

HOW DO YOU WRITE A NEWS RELEASE?

Get the facts in the first paragraph (commonly called the lead) of the release. Editors are busy people and don't have time to read three pages to find out what happened in your school. The lead should summarize the story telling who, what, where, when, why and how. Get the facts out first. Tell what happened, then elaborate. Start with the most important facts first.

Sixth graders at Thomas Katz School will help first graders write and illustrate their own reading book. . .

Editors call this method of writing the inverted pyramid. If they run out of space when laying out the page, they can cut elaboration without removing the important facts,



PRINCIPLES FOR WRITING NEWS RELEASES

- **Use familiar words; write at the sixth grade level**

  ~~*aggregate*~~ ⟶ *total*

- **Use short, simple sentences; subject, verb, object**

  Children paint pictures.

- **Use action verbs; avoid verb "to be"**

- **Avoid useless words**

  ~~*at the present time*~~ ⟶ *now*

- **Be accurate; don't cover up the bad; be factual, truthful and complete; admit a weakness, explain what is being done to overcome it**

- **Be objective; give facts and numbers; avoid adjectives unless attributed**

- **Attribute all quotes**

  "The kids are great," commented Miss Patricia Flower, student teacher at Hillcrest School.

- **Vary sentence structure**

- **Write in third person; unless "folksie" impression is wanted**

- **Write the way you talk; avoid jargon such as the following:**

  In order to obtain optimum utilization of the physical facilities at our disposal and permit increased opportunities for developing individual faculty proficiencies, reconstruction of existing departmental lounges into private offices will commence immediately. **Which means –**

  Department lounges will be converted to faculty offices.

- **Write in active voice**

- **Explain new terms; use concrete terms such as follows:**

  Libraries aren't the same anymore. Globes, films, records, charts and books are all in one room. With the change came a new name – resource centers.

- **Identify people; full name, position in first reference**

  Miss Susan Murphy, English Teacher at Hillcrest School, threw . . . . . Miss Murphy said . . . . .

- **Personalize the message; relate to readers' experiences**

RELEASES SHOULD FOLLOW A STANDARD FORM

- **Use 8½" x 11" paper**

- **Type on one side of the paper**

- Double or triple space
- Leave large margins
- Put name, address, and phone number of person sending the release at the top on the left
- Put date sent and release date on the top
- Release "at will" unless timing is important
- Indent each new paragraph at least five spaces
- Leave at least two inches between the information at the top and the story for headlining at the printer
- Don't split a paragraph when going on to the next page. Single space the last few lines if necessary
- Place "more" at the bottom of each non-final page
- Place a word or phrase (slug) on the top of each additional page to identify the story to which it belongs
- Write "add" plus one less than the page number on each additional page
- Write 30 or # at the bottom of the last page
- Write ok or cq over names and unusual spellings to indicate that they are spelled correctly
- Send the original and save a carbon copy for your files

HOW SHOULD BOOKLETS AND BROCHURES BE WRITTEN?

Unless parents can understand what you are saying, brochures and booklets are a waste of time, paper and ink. Communicate.

You must communicate with a community that's in a hurry. Direct the message to the reader. Use familiar words. A sixth grade reading level communicates best. Use short sentences with one or two main ideas. Don't waste words; when you've said what you want to say, stop.

Be concise, but not tactless. Put yourself in the place of the parent. Would the soft sell be better than straight facts? Analogies may help explain complicated terms. For example, readers understand why a clerk in a grocery store should be taught to add correctly, but might not comprehend the "application of fundamental arithmetic processes in environmental situations."

Principles for writing news releases apply when writing brochures and booklets.

WHAT ABOUT LAYOUT AND TYPOGRAPHY?

You are competing for your reader's attention. He'll never know what you have to say unless you catch his eye and get him to look inside and read. Layout is important in getting the reader to read.

To
Use
These
Talents

(Cover design carries the reader inside to the copy.)

THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT TYPE

- **Set columns no wider than two alphabets (52 characters wide);**

- **Ideal copy width is twice the type size (measured in points) in picas (a printers measurement approximately 1/6")**

- **How wide would 10 point type be set?**

- **Type size**

in points	x	2	width in picas
↓	↓	↓	↓
10	x	2	20 picas

- **Ten point type should be set 20 picas or about 3½ inches wide for maximum readability**

Is it easier to read a sentence that is spread across the page like this one is? **or –**

Do you prefer reading this sentence which is set 32 characters wide?

- **Keep left margins straight; you need not justify right margin unless you use two columns on the page; research shows non-justified margin is as readable as justified**

- **Century or Cheltenham types communicate best**

- **Don't print over designs**

- **Avoid fancy letters**

- **Stay with one type face**

- **Use serif upper and lower case letters for blocks of copy;**

serif type → PENNSYLVANIA

sanserif type → PENNSYLVANIA

- **Avoid setting blocks of copy in reverse**

- **Use sanserif type at least 14 points for reverses;**

Reverse type looks like white ink on a block of color

- **Never use less than 8 point or more than 36 point type on an 8 x 11 publication (72 points is an inch high)**

- **Usually keep body type 8 or 10 point type;**

8 point: Pennsylvania

10 point: Pennsylvania

- **Leave room between lines of type**

If spacing between the words is critical to the easy flow of the eye along a line of type, then the spacing between the lines must also be considered.

This block of copy is set without any space between the lines which makes it difficult to read.

This block of copy is set with two points of space (called leading) between the lines.

THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT PAPER

- **Use white, grey or yellow**

- **For ease of reading use: black ink on white paper, black ink on pale yellow paper, or dark blue ink on white paper**

THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT HEADLINES

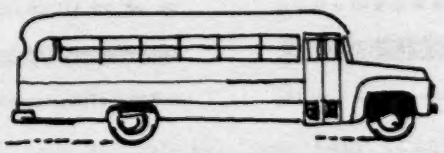
- Use upper and lower case letters; all capitals do not communicate as well
- Use sanserif letters
- Summarize the story in the headline
- Use action verbs
- Short headlines are most effective
- Use no more than three lines in headline

WAYS TO BREAK UP COPY

- Leave white space around the copy
- Put information in boxes
- Use bullets rather than numbers on lists (shows that all points are important); the dots before items on this page are bullets
- Use boldface type for words and paragraphs;

  This is bold face type This is light face type

- Illustrate points

  Pen and ink sketches . . .

Clip art . . .

Books of pen and ink sketches ready to cut and paste down; available from yearbook companies and many art stores

Transfer letters . . .

PSBA
PSBA
PSBA

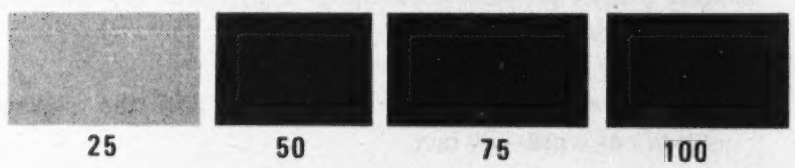
Sheets of pressure letters used for headlines; cost about $2 from art stores

Chartpak

Rolls of adhesive tape used for designs and boxes; cost about $2; available at art stores

- **Use subheads between paragraphs**

- **Screen some of the copy; use more than 50% screen for reverses; use less than 30% screen and boldface for regular type**



- **Remember rules of typography**

- **Keep columns no more than two alphabets (52 characters) wide**

- **Place stories horizontally rather than vertically on page**

- **Use method on page 18 to determine story length**

- **If two pages go together to tell a story, use similar style headlines, type size, column width and pictures to connect them.**

If on one page you use . . .	On a non-related page, use . . .
color	no color
headline at top	drop headline
heavy illustration	no illustration
short headline	longer headline
reverse headline	straight type
single line headline	multiple line headline
narrow column width	wider column width
copy at the bottom of page	copy at the top of page
solid color	screened color
boxed items	no boxes
screened copy	no screens
bold type	light type
vertical pictures	horizontal pictures
tight page	loose page
large pictures	small or no pictures
vertical layout	horizontal layout
balanced arrangement	unbalanced arrangement

COUNTING COPY AND HEADLINES TO FIT

- Count words in story
- Determine word count per inch;
- Have printer set several blocks of copy in the type size and column width you will be using
- Count random inch-long sections to find the average number of words per inch
- Determine the length of your stories; total number of words in story = inches set; average words per inch in sample
- Make a rough layout to see if stories fit; block out headlines, stories and pictures
- Get samples of upper and lower case headlines from printer

Camera-ready Copy

Camera-ready copy is ready to be photographed as is. Money can be saved by preparing copy for the printer camera-ready. A light blue pencil, T square, triangle, ruler, scissors and paper cement are needed to do camera-ready pasteups. Paste things exactly as you wish them to appear in the publication. If copy isn't straight on the pasteup, it will be printed crooked.

Printing costs can be cut by preparing camera-ready pasteups for materials to be run on a mimeo machine. For clean copy, use a carbon paper ribbon, such as on the IBM Selectric typewriter, and white paper.

Use black blacks and white whites for best reproduction. Photographs reproduce poorly on electric stencils. Carbon transfer letters, chartpak, clip art and pen and ink illustrations give good contrast.

An electric stencil of the pasteup can be made at a business machine company for about $3. (The electric stencil machine costs about $2000.) Once burned, the stencil can be run on any mimeo machine. Separate stencils must be made for each color if copy is to be run in several color inks.

If the school has access to an offset machine, materials can be printed using a plate made from the camera-ready pasteup. If desired, a more professional look can be obtained by having a printer set the

copy. The pasteup can then be made camera-ready at the school and the brochure printed on the school's offset machine.

Don't rely on all printers to pick the "right" types or papers to communicate. Many don't know principles of layout and typography. There are exceptions, but be very careful. Read all copy carefully for errors and to be sure that the brochure is as you want it.

If a commercial printer is to print the brochure, he must know the following information about the job:

- **Paper weight, texture, size and color**
- **Number of brochures to be printed**
- **Number of pages per brochure**
- **Type face to be used**
- **Ink colors to be used**
- **Method of folding and binding**
- **Amount of copy to be set**
- **Number of pictures and illustrations**
- **Who does pasteups**
- **Who proofreads copy for mistakes and how often**
- **Date of delivery**

METHODS OF DISTRIBUTION

- **Hand carried by students (most effective in primary grades after fifth grade)**
- **Place stacks in public places (banks, post office, churches, stores, doctors' and dentists' offices)**
- **Mail – Check bulk rates. Will weight affect cost? Keep up-to-date listing of parents, influential groups, radio and TV stations and newspapers.**
- **Door-to-door (by service organizations)**

PHOTOGRAPHY

Photographs should be technically correct and communicate a single message. Make the best use of limited equipment to obtain meaningful pictures. Use your imagination. Don't be afraid to try an unusual approach when shooting a standard situation. Photograph people doing things; avoid head and shoulder shots when possible. Chances of getting a story printed are greater if you send a picture. A head and shoulder shot is better than none at all. When taking photographs, remember:

- **Get good focus, exposure and prints**
- **Get good contrast; Turn the picture upside-down to see if it is overly dark or light without being distracted by the content**
- **Get action shots**
- **Take close-ups; fill the picture**
- **Don't take large groups of people; best size is three or less**

All pictures should have captions to explain them. Captions should tell a complete story and identify all people. Paste captions on the back of pictures so that the caption hangs loosely below the picture. This

will help people at the newspaper identify pictures and reduce errors in captions. Use of pictures is important in preparing booklets and brochures. Remember:

- **Rectangular pictures communicate best**
- **Leave 25% white space around pictures**
- **Place the picture above and to the left of the story it illustrates**
- **Have the action in the picture point toward the story; printer can "flop" the picture if it is going the wrong way**
- **Cut out (commonly called cropping) extraneous background materials from the picture**
- **Use large pictures; the larger the picture, the more people will remember it**
- **Don't use color pictures; effect doesn't warrant increased price**
- **Don't write on the back of a photograph; pressure causes writing to come through; use a caption**
- **Don't paper clip photographs; clip will remove finish**

Photographs can be used for things other than news releases and booklets and brochures. Other uses of photographs in school public relations include:

- **Slide displays to accompany speakers**
- **Bulletin board displays in public buildings**
- **Displays of five or six pictures on a specific topic and explanation of the school program in store window**
- **Books of pictures and captions about school programs in waiting rooms**
- **Gifts to retiring teachers and board members**

Be sure to have lots of film. It is better to take extra pictures than to miss the shot and have to go back. Often it is impossible to relive the shot.

If taking Polaroid pictures, be sure to fill the picture with content. A portrait attachment can be used for close-up shots. Take several shots until you get good contrast. Be sure that the background does not blend with the subject. Some newspapers can use Polaroid pictures; others can't. Check to see if your local paper will accept them. Polaroid shots can usually be reproduced on photo offset equipment.

If you can't take pictures yourself or afford to hire a photographer, but are preparing a brochure and want a picture of money on a scale, you can buy one from an agency. Pictures aren't local, but may be just what you need. DeWys, Inc., 124 East 40th Street, New York City, and Lambert Studios, 2801 West Cheltenham Avenue, Philadelphia, sell pictures.

ENLARGING AND REDUCING COPY

It is easy to go from known size to unknown size by using the diagonal line method. Although usually used for cropping pictures, this method can be used to determine the size of letters and documents that are enlarged or reduced when printed.

For example, an 8" x 10" picture is to be reduced so that the 8" size is 6". How long will the 10" size be?

1. **Draw an 8" x 10" rectangle on paper.**
2. **Draw a diagonal line from the lower left to the upper right corners.**
3. **Measure 6" along the 8" side.**
4. **Run a line from the 6" point up to the diagonal.**
5. **Measure the line just made. This is the length of the other size when the 8" side is 6".**

Or you can also use a proportional scale which is available at art stores.

Extreme changes in size in either direction cause loss of details. Enlarged pictures become fuzzy; reductions lose delicate detail. For best results use pictures close to the size desired.

GLOSSARY

Add number- number at top of page to tell the printer its place in the story; one less than the page number.

Boldface – type variation that is heavier and darker then the regular type.

Bullet – dots used rather than numbers before items in a list to show that all are important.

Camera-Ready – illustrations, copy and headlines are pasted in place ready to be photographed for offset printing.

Caption – paragraph that tells a story while explaining a picture.

Chartpak – rolls of adhesive tape used for designs and boxes.

Clip art – book of pen and ink sketches ready to cut and paste.

Deck – line in a headline.

Dummy – scale drawing showing printer approximate location of headlines, copy and illustrations; ink color; and headline and copy type sizes.

Inverted pyramid – style of writing in which the important facts in the lead are followed by elaboration.

Justify – spacing a line of type so that it fills to the margin.

Lead – (lēd) the first paragraph of a news release summarizing the story by telling who, what, where, when, why and how.

Leading – (l̆ĕ̆ding) space between lines of type.

More – placed on the bottom of non-final pages of copy so the printer knows that the story continues.

"Off the record" – background information given to a reporter that is **not to be printed.**

Ok or cq – written over unusual spellings to indicate that they are spelled correctly.

Pica – horizontal measurement used by printers (equal to 1/6")

Point – measure of type height equal to 1/72"

Reverse – printing that looks like white type on a block of color

Sanserif – type without serifs.

Screen – a tinted block ranging from 10 to 100 percent of the ink color on which boldface type is printed to break-up copy.

Serif – the tail on the end of a cross stroke of letters.

Slug – word or phrase on the top of each additional page to identify the story to which it belongs.

Specs – information a printer needs about a job including paper weight, texture, size and color; number of items; ink color; number of pages; binding and folding method; number of illustrations; and method of delivery.

Subhead – a centered line of type between paragraphs of a story used to summarize the following paragraph.

Transfer letters– sheets of pressure sensitive letters used for headlines for offset jobs.

White space – space left around print to let it breathe.

30 – marked at bottom of last page to show end of story.

- see 30

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